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ABSTRACT

To explore the roles that government, business, and community institutions might play in ensuring that African Americans get the job training they need to be competitive in the 21st century, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies invited U.S. Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman to meet with representatives of the business community. Forum participants also heard from Albert Siu, human resources vice president for education and training at AT&T and Margaret Simms, the Joint Center's vice president for research. Secretary Herman reviewed the current situation for job skills and employment for African Americans and indicated that the profile of the workforce has shifted toward technology without the necessary investments to improve the skill levels of workers. Secretary Herman also reviewed recent federal and private sector initiatives aimed at job skills training. Dr. Simms pointed to federal school-to-work initiatives as evidence of a change in attitudes in the United States about the role of the private sector in educating the next generation of workers. Dr. Siu explained how investments in worker training pay off for the employer and cited advantages of electronic learning technologies for worker training. (Contains 10 references.) (SLD)

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THE AMERICAN WORKFORCE IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM:

The Growing Demand for Skills

A Report from the Joint Center's 1999 Corporate Forum

Prepared by Cecilia A. Conrad
May 1999

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Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

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To be competitive in the 21st century, the U.S. labor force, and African Americans in particular, stand in need of strengthened job training. Government, business, and community institutions can all play a role in ensuring that this happens. To explore this matter, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies invited U.S. Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman to meet with representatives of the business community at the Joint Center's first annual corporate forum. The forum also included presentations by Dr. Albert Siu, human resources vice president for education and training at AT&T, and Dr. Margaret Simms, the Joint Center's vice president for research. Participants learned about the latest federal initiatives; heard from an industry leader; and identified research and policy challenges for the future. This publication draws from these presentations and from the discussions that followed.

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The Growing Demand for Skills

INTRODUCTION

For African Americans, the recent surge in economic prosperity has increased employment opportunities. The black unemployment rate fell to 7.7 percent in April 1999, the lowest rate since 1972. However, this good economic news should not be a cause for complacency. African Americans continue to be underrepresented in managerial and professional jobs and they are underrepresented in the jobs projected to grow the fastest into the next century—those that require the development or use of information technology. Employers have increased their demand for skills, and unless African American workers can improve the skills they bring to the labor market, their recent employment gains are likely to be eroded. The current period of prosperity is an opportune time to explore the roles that government, business, and community institutions might play in ensuring that African Americans get the job training they need to be competitive in the 21st century. To explore these issues, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies invited U.S. Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman to meet with representatives of the business community at the Joint Center's first annual corporate forum. Forum participants also heard from Dr. Albert Siu, human resources vice president for education and training at AT&T, and from Dr. Margaret Simms, the Joint Center's own vice president for research.

"We don't have a worker shortage in this country, but we do have a skill shortage."

– Labor Secretary Alexis Herman

CHANGING SKILL REQUIREMENTS

A dominant trend in the U.S. labor market has been the increasing demand for skill. In the 1950s, according to Secretary Herman, 20 percent of the workforce could be

Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman responds to questions at the Joint Center's 1999 Corporate Forum. Listening is Dr. Albert Siu of AT&T.

classified as skilled labor, 60 percent as unskilled, and the remaining as professional workers. By 1997, these statistics had become inverted: only 20 percent of jobs were unskilled while 60 percent were skilled. The percentage in the professional category has not changed. Thanks to flatter and less hierarchical organizational structures, employers increasingly need workers with problem-solving, decision-making, and teamwork skills. In the new workplace, decisions once made in corporate offices are made on the shop floor. The 1994 Educational Quality of the Workforce (EQW) National Employer Survey found that more than half of nonmanagerial employees participated in regularly scheduled meetings to discuss work-related problems.

Technology has also had an impact. On-the-job computer use is growing in all jobs. The percentage of all individuals age 18 and over that reported using a computer at work grew between 1989 and 1993 from 36.8 percent to 45.8 percent. Also on the increase is information technology "worker intensity"—the percentage of industry workers that are computer scientists and engineers, systems analysts, and computer programmers. The Department of Commerce projects that worker intensity in this area will grow across all industries. In the banking industry, for example, Commerce predicts it will rise from 5.27 percent (in 1994) to 6.53

percent in 2005, and in the life insurance industry from 6.13 percent to 7.96 percent. In the 1994 EQW survey, 56 percent of American business establishments reported that restructuring and the introduction of new technology have increased the skill requirements for nonmanagerial employees.

Not surprisingly, jobs requiring computer skills top the list of the fastest-growing occupations. The Department of Labor projects that while overall U.S. employment will grow by only 14 percent between 1996 and 2006, database administrator and computer support specialist jobs will grow by 118 percent. According to Labor projections, jobs requiring a bachelor's degree will grow by 25 percent and those requiring an associate's degree by 22 percent.

The growing demand for skill is evident in the premium employers are willing to pay for workers with education and training. According to the Department of Labor, in 1997 the average college graduate made 77 percent more than the typical high school graduate, but in 1978 only 58 percent more. Even a single year at a community college can increase a male's wages between 8 and 14 percent (depending on his age). Among high school graduates, work-related training can also boost earnings: in 1991, those with training earned 26 percent more than those without it.

Clearly, the new economy is demanding increased investments in education and training, but how responsive is the supply? Although college enrollments are increasing, skill deficits persist. More than one in five Americans demonstrate literacy and numeracy skills at or below the fifth grade level, while another quarter of Americans demonstrate skills between the sixth and eighth grade levels. The number of earned degrees (associates, bachelor's, master's, and doctorates) in mathematics and computer science is declining. "We have literally shifted the entire profile of our workforce without the necessary investments to bring up the skill levels of workers today," Secretary Herman observed at the Joint Center forum. "As a matter of fact, in the United States, less than half of our workers actually have a college degree. We don't have a worker shortage in this country, but we do have a skill shortage."

Federal Initiatives That Support Workforce Education and Training

Postsecondary Education and Other Training

Hope Scholarships: With Hope Scholarships, students in the first two years of college or other eligible postsecondary training programs can get tax credit of up to $1,500 for tuition and fees.

Lifetime Learning Credit: Students beyond the first two years of college, or those taking classes part time to upgrade their job skills, can receive a 20 percent credit for the first $5,000 of tuition and fees each year through 2002. After the year 2002, the credit is available on the first $10,000 in tuition and fees.

Pell Grants: This program provides grants to low- and middle-income undergraduate students.

Student Loans: Federal Family Education Loan program guarantees commercial loans, and the Direct Loan Program provides loans directly to schools and students.

Learning Anytime, Anywhere Partnerships: Provides grants to partnerships of two or more independent organizations to ensure that high-quality learning opportunities are available to distance-education students.

Montgomery G.I. Bill – Active Duty and Selected Reserve: Veterans and reservists receive education benefits for degree and certificate programs, flight training, apprenticeship/on-the-job training, correspondence courses, and other training.

Veterans Education Assistance Program: Benefits may be used for degree and certificate programs, and other training.

Workforce Development

Exclusion for Employer-Provided Educational Assistance: A tax exemption for employer-provided educational assistance for undergraduate courses that begin before June 1, 2000. Employers may continue to provide up to $5,250 per year in educational assistance to each employee on a tax-exempt basis for courses beginning before that date, regardless of whether the education is job-related.

Workforce Investment Act of 1998: Provides job search, employment counseling, and training services to adults, dislocated workers, and youth.

One-Stop Delivery Systems: In a single neighborhood resource center, One-Stops provide information about and access to a wide array of job training, education, and employment services.

Adult Education and Literacy: Funds state and local program to help educationally disadvantaged adults–including welfare recipients and immigrants–develop basic skills (including literacy), complete secondary education, and learn English.

America's Learning Exchange (ALX): Part of America's Career Kit, ALX is an Internet program that makes it easier for employers and individuals to find the training they need.

Manufacturing Extension Partnership: Help smaller manufacturers address work with education and training providers to match their capabilities with manufacturers' requirement. Companies are assisted through more than 400 nonprofit linked centers and offices around the country.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce et al., 1999.

FEDERAL INITIATIVES

The most recent federal initiative to address this skill shortage is the Worker Investment Act of 1998 (WIA). Passed in August 1998, the WIA streamlines and redesigns federal funding of job training, adult education, and literacy and vocational rehabilitation programs to create a more flexible and better coordinated workforce development system.

Secretary Herman emphasized the increased role of the private sector under this new legislation. The WIA legislation mandates the creation of State Workforce Investment Boards, which will have the broad authority to guide development of the state's workforce investment program. A majority of the members of the State Workforce Investment Boards will be representatives of the business community. Private businesses will provide information and leadership and will play an active role in ensuring that the system prepares people for current and future jobs.

The WIA also requires that public-private partnerships be developed at the local level, again with the business community at the helm. These local partnerships will be instrumental in the establishment of one-stop delivery systems for training and other job development services. The one-stop delivery system will coordinate information from a variety of sources to assist job applicants in identifying job openings, to explore work preparation and career development services, and to access training and education programs.

Carla Dancy-Smith, director of trade policy at EDS, listens to comments from William (Larry) Lucas, associate vice president for association relations at PhRMA.

An additional provision of the WIA is the creation of Individual Training Accounts. Adult customers may use the funds in these accounts to purchase training at community colleges, vocational schools, or other eligible training facilities. The WIA

includes targeted funding to prepare disadvantaged youth for postsecondary employment or education.

Another federal initiative that relies on public-private partnerships is Welfare-to-Work. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 imposed work requirements on most recipients of public assistance. To assist these "new workers" in finding jobs, President Clinton specifically requested the help of the private sector. In response, the Welfare-to-Work Partnership (www.welfaretowork.org) was formed in May 1997. The partnership, which initially had five members, now has 10,000 business partners, 80 percent of which are small businesses. Each business partner pledges to hire at least one individual off the welfare ranks without displacing current workers. The partnership shares information about service providers, work supports, and training that can help improve the retention rates of those making the transition from welfare to work. Secretary Herman expressed the hope that the lessons learned from the Welfare-to-Work Partnership will have a broader impact on the training of all entry-level employees.

Youths making the transition from school to work represent another category of new workers. Again, public and private partnerships are key to the success of the federal School-to-Work initiative (www.stw.ed.gov). The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 provides seed money to states and local partnerships of businesses, educational institutions, community organizations, and local governments to link classroom-based education with experiential learning through internships, mentor programs, and jobs. One in four U.S. businesses and industries is involved in School-to-Work initiatives. School-to-Work programs appear to increase the academic achievement of participants and to increase their employability.

Citing the long history of apprenticeship programs in western Europe, Dr. Simms pointed to federal School-to-Work initiatives as evidence of a change in attitudes in this country about the role of the private sector in educating the next generation of workers.

EMPLOYER INVESTMENTS IN TRAINING

Many employers are increasing their investments in worker training, but AT&T appears to be an industry leader. In the American Society for Training and Development's (ASTD) annual survey, the leading-edge companies spent, on average, $1,245 per employee on training. AT&T spends $700 million per year on a workforce of 109,000, or roughly $6,422 per employee.

Describing AT&T's workforce development program, Dr. Siu emphasized the importance of collaboration. "We've also learned that we can't do it alone," he said, "so we've looked to partnerships with our unions, other companies, and the public sector." In 1986, AT&T joined its unions to form the Alliance for Employee Growth and Development. This alliance identifies skill requirements and provides worker training. Nearly 40 percent of employees at AT&T participate in programs sponsored by the Alliance. AT&T's commitment to its unions, as described by Dr. Siu, is a promise not of "lifetime employment, but of lifetime employability." AT&T has also partnered with other businesses. To aid displaced workers, in 1996 AT&T formed the Talent Alliance with a dozen other corporations, including Lucent Technologies, Johnson & Johnson, MetLife, GTE, and DuPont. In addition to sharing lists of job openings, the employers plan to share training resources, particularly on-line career development resources.

Joint Center board members Hector Hyacinthe (l) and Elliott Hall (c) ponder questions raised by Mel Farr, founder/ owner of Mel Farr Automotive Group and a member of the Minority Business Round Table (MBRT)

In addition to its collaborative efforts, AT&T expresses its commitment to education and training by making continuous training part of an employee's performance review and through generous college tuition reimbursement plans. Two hundred million dollars out of AT&T's $700 million education and training budget went to colleges and universities. A program at AT&T Laboratories provides funding for up to six years of graduate study in sciences and engineering for minority students and women.

AT&T's commitment to education and training extends beyond the borders of the company. Through its foundation, it supplies computer technology to K-12 classrooms and supports teacher training. AT&T also encourages its employees to volunteer in local schools. Dr. Siu explains that basic skills (the ability to read and comprehend, math skills, and communications skills) are still the most important ones—"the ability to learn is the key skill people need to develop."

TRAINING ISSUES FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Investments in worker training pay off for the employer. Firms that provide formal on-the-job training raise their productivity by roughly 15 to 20 percent on average. As Dr. Siu explained it, "the essence of our economic power is what's in our employees' heads." Yet, employer-provided training is not universal. More than half of American manufacturers spend less than one percent of their payroll on training, while 4 percent of them spend nothing. On average, the high-tech industry spends $911 per worker, while the customer-service sector spends only $162 per employee.

Small businesses are least likely to offer training to their employees. For a smaller company, the training costs per employee may be prohibitively expensive, whereas a large firm can spread the costs of training over a large employee base. In addition, a small company may face a greater risk than a large one that workers, once trained, will leave the firm. Because its smaller workforce limits its ability to promote workers within the firm, a worker who has undergone such training may only earn a return by finding new employment elsewhere. Moreover, small firms may lack the expertise and technical resources necessary to design and implement effective workforce development programs.

The forum identified two strategies that might assist small businesses and their employees: (1) the use of electronic learning technologies to lower costs and (2) collaborative programs with other businesses and with community colleges. Ironically, the technology that has increased the demand for skill is also likely to make training more accessible, especially for workers in small businesses. The ASTD's 1997 analysis of training industry trends predicted that advances in technology will revolutionize training delivery. Particularly dramatic has been growth in use of the "intranet," a term that describes any network contained within an organization. Use of the intranet allows multiple-site delivery and the delivery of training closer to people's work sites. Thus, it can spread the cost of training over a greater number of employees. In 1996, 13.5 percent of the respondents in ASTD's survey used intranets; 44.8 percent expected to use the technology in 1997.

Dr. Siu cited several advantages of electronic learning technologies, including lower travel costs and a wider choice of courses. In addition, workers can strengthen their familiarity with the technology they will increasingly use on the job. In 1997, 10 percent of AT&T's training courses were offered on disc, CD-ROM, or the web. In 1999, this was true for nearly a third of its training courses, and by the year 2000 it will be true for close to half of the training.

Secretary Herman outlined several Department of Labor initiatives to use technology so that training information is more accessible to small companies and their employees. Labor has initiated an on-line journal of best practices that describes effective training programs. Its "e-law" system offers electronic access to information about labor laws, while its special website, America's Learning Exchange (www.alx.org), links users to education and training resources at no cost and even includes on-line demos of some learning technologies. In addition, the Department of Labor supports the Training Technology Resource Center, a website (www.ttrc.doleta.gov) that serves as a point of access for workforce development information.

Collaborative initiatives also can help small businesses. Forum participants described collaborative efforts between their companies and minority vendors. For example, Phillip Morris works to

develop technical expertise among minority vendors, including assistance in obtaining an MBA. Community colleges can assist local small businesses by offering training programs tailored to their needs.

TRAINING ISSUES AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN WORKER

The need for expanded opportunities for skill development may be most acute in the African American community. Although the unemployment rate for blacks is at its lowest in more than 20 years, unemployment rates among black teenagers remain nearly double those among white teenagers. Relative to white workers, fewer African Americans and Latinos have college degrees, and even fewer have degrees in math, science, or engineering. African Americans and Latinos, on average, tend to score lower on tests of reading and mathematics proficiency than whites.

Beyond basic skill gaps, there appear to be racial differences in access to employer-provided training. The table on the next page describes the training experience of persons ages 18-64, by race/ethnicity, as of the year 1993. Although similar proportions of African Americans and whites had received worker-related training, higher proportions of whites had received training that was specifically provided by the employer. Blacks and Latinos were more likely to have received training paid for by federal, state, and local governments. This racial difference in access to training

Robert L. Johnson, MBRT member and the founder, chairman & CEO of Black Entertainment Television, with Joint Center President Eddie N. Williams.

WORK-RELATED TRAINING EXPERIENCES, SPRING 1993

	Total Population	White	Black	Hispanic Origin
Total With Work-Related Training	42,225	35,736	5,063	2,830
Total With Work-Related Training as Proportion of Population Ages 18-64	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.19
Proportion of Population With Work-Related Training: Employer-Provided	0.48	0.51	0.33	0.36
Proportion of Population With Work-Related Training: Federal, State, or Local Gov't.	0.25	0.22	0.45	0.38

Source: http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/education/table07.txt

may reflect racial differences in the distribution of workers by industry and size of firm, but it requires further study.

Dr. Margaret Simms, in her presentation to the forum, observed that some of the problems faced by young African Americans in the labor market are attributable not to a lack of technical skills, but to a perceived deficit in "soft skills." Soft skills include thinking and problem-solving skills, oral communication skills, personal qualities and work ethic, and interpersonal and teamwork skills. This category of skills ranks just below computer skills in the ASTD's ranking of the top 10 human resource development trends (see box on page 14).

In a paper that appears in Job Creation Prospects and Strategies, a recent Joint Center volume, Harry Holzer, a professor at Michigan State University and chief economist at the Department of Labor, documents the impact soft skills have on young African American men's employment opportunities. Commenting on Holzer's work, Dr. Simms stated, "His analysis shows that black workers suffer either because they don't have those skills or because employers think they don't have them. Both are

equally important. This suggests two issues. One is the need to ensure that training is available, and second is the importance of urging employers to think outside of the box—to not make assumptions about the skills minority workers have." Dr. Simms cited the experience of minority-owned businesses as evidence that young black workers can become productive and valuable employees. Research published by the Joint Center, including work by Timothy Bates, has shown that minority-owned businesses recruit in low-income neighborhoods more successfully and hire more minority workers than do other businesses.

Dr. Simms acknowledged that many employers are unsure about how to provide soft skills training. The Joint Center recently published a compendium of soft skills training programs.[1] Citing this study, Dr. Simms observed that there are programs that work. "Many of these programs are run not by corporations, but by community organizations. This is another example where collaboration can be valuable." Forum participants noted that what young workers often need is a support system—mentors and job coaching—to assist in the transition to the world of work.

Forum participants raised another issue that will require that the business community think outside of the box -the employment of ex-offenders. Although the education and training issues for ex-offenders are similar to those for other new workers, ex-offenders face an additional obstacle. Many companies simply will not consider them for employment. When asked how high the employment hurdle is for ex-offenders, one forum participant replied, 50,000 feet high!" A recent Michigan State University survey of 5,000 employers suggests that two out of three organizations refuse to hire con-

1. *Soft Skills Training: An Annotated Guide to Selected Programs*, by Wilhelmina Leigh, Deitra Lee, and Malinda Lindquist.

Top 10 Trends

Here are the top 10 Human Resources Development (HRD) trends, according to respondents to the July 1997 National HRD Executive Summary.

Currently:

1. *Computer skills training*
2. *Teamwork training*
3. *Shift from training to performance*
4. *Decision-making and problem-solving training*
5. *Rapid development and deployment of training*
6. *Systems-thinking training*
7. *Demonstrating training outcomes*
9. *Shift from training to learning*
10. *Making a business case for training inventions*

Next Three Years:

1. *Shift from training to performance*
2. *Computer skills training to learning*
4. *Virtual organization*
5. *Demonstrating training outcomes*
6. *Measuring performance outcomes*
7. *Delivering training to meet specific needs*
8. *Emphasis on knowledge management*
9. *Rapid development and deployment of training*
10. *Teamwork training*

Source: Bassi et al., 1998

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victed felons. Forum participants suggested that in the tight labor market, employers might be persuaded to adopt a more flexible attitude toward ex-felons—distinguishing individuals based on the type of crime committed. Others noted the need for more information about employer policies. Given the high rates of incarceration among African Americans, employer attitudes toward the employment of ex-offenders represent a major challenge to the achievement of economic self-sufficiency.

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USEFUL WEBSITES:
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American Society for Training and Development: www.astd.org
National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce: www.irhe.upenn.edu
School-to-Work initiative: www.stw.ed.gov
Training Technology Resource Center (U.S. Department of Labor): www.ttrc.doleta.gov
Welfare-to-Work Partnership: www.welfaretowork.org

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American Express Company
American Income Life Insurance Company
Anheuser-Busch Companies, Inc.
Armstrong World Industries Inc.
AT&T
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Black Entertainment Television
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